Thais List 'Pro-Communist' Newsmen

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BANGKOK, Oct. 19 — The campaign against leftists that began here when military officers seized power two weeks ago today turned on Thai journalists.

Articles published by two extreme rightist newspapers this morning listed the names of 57 journalists who allegedly "have committed acts endangering national security by serving the Communists."

All newspapers already are under severe censorship by the military government. "I was expecting something like this sooner or later," said an editor whose name appeared on the list, "but, like everyone else, I guess I never expected it to touch me personally."

The list, which appeared in Khao Raiwan and Tawan Siam, was compiled by police, the anti-Communist Internal Security Operations Command and the National Security Council, according to staff members of the two papers. Spokesmen for the organizations refused to comment.

Col. Karoon Kengradomying, a spokesman for the ruling National Administrative Reform Council, said that he was "personally concerned" by the articles because among those listed were five members of the government's own public relations department and three employees of a semi-official television station. Karoon added, "As far as I'm able to determine at this time," the list was not prepared by the council, or NARC, as it has become widely known.

A member of the military organization charged with censoring the local papers said however, that "The articles would not be allowed to be published if they were not true. We censor everything."

Two of those listed have already been arrested. They are Pansak Vinyaratn, publisher of the liberal weekly magazine, Chaturas, and Vatchara Vethayathirang, an economics writer for the mass circulation Thai Rath, who writes under the pen name Yodthong Thabthiiewmai.

Journalists who worked under restrictions set by past Thai military governments said they could not recall any of them being as tough with the press as the NARC.

"He always understood there were certain subjects we couldn't touch," said the published of one major daily. "But we could live with that and to the best of my knowledge, no reporter ever was arrested."

As reported by Khao Raiwan, the newsmen listed had been investigated by police during Thailand's abortive three-year experiment with democratic rule, but could not be arrested then.

"Their acts are considered more than 70 per cent inclined toward communism," the paper reported, without explaining how this measurement was determined.

The high command has begun warning editors that certain of their staff members are under suspicion of Communist activity. Several have responded by firing staff reporters and columnists. In addition, 13 newspapers have been banned outright by the military government, resulting in several thousand journalists and other employees being put out of work.

Several journalists on the list suspect that their names were turned in by colleagues to settle personal grievances. "It's a tradition of long standing among Thai newsmen to attack each other in print," said one veteran journalist.

Although the once-lively Thai press has been reduced to insipidity by official strictures, most editors seem to believe that it is better to publish under any circumstances than not to publish at all. "I'm hopeful that before too long, the present fires of restrictiveness will cool off and we'll even be allowed to offer constructive criticism through our columns," said one editor.

So far, the limitations make meaningful journalism virtually impossible here. Publishers of those journals allowed to publish have had to sign a seven-point "Press Code" that forbids them from printing articles, photographs or cartoons in any way critical of the government or to touch on a broad variety of other topics.

The military authorities are continuing to confiscate and burn thousands of books and other printed material considered "pro-Communist."

Huge bonfires burn everyday at police stations throughout the capital. Some residents of Bangkok and other cities have been burning their own books in fear of having them discovered by police raiding parties and thus being incriminated.

Schools and universities have been closed indefinitely since the new government came to power. Undersecretary of State for Education Charoon Wongsayant, who is in control of the Education Ministry until NARC appoints its own minister, told a group of 500 educators yesterday that teaching of all forms of political theory, including democratic concepts, will be banned when schools are allowed to reopen.